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December 13, 1978

Dear Mr. Gradison:

Thank you for your letter of December 4, 1978, in which you request information about the U.S. response to the Guyana tragedy. As you know, the United States Government continues to be involved in this tragic episode and is investigating various aspects of the situation. Nevertheless, I wanted to give you an early response to the questions you have raised concerning this unprecedented matter.

On Sunday, November 19, it had become clear that the United States Government was facing a major crisis in Guyana. An American Congressman and other Americans in his party had been killed. A settlement believed to include over 1,000 Americans was involved, and its situation was uncertain. It was apparent that the Government of Guyana required assistance in handling a major emergency created by the presence of Americans within its borders.

The President, acting under his constitutional authority as Chief Executive and Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces, ordered the departments of our government to take action to deal with this emergency. The operational decisions within the U.S. Government in this unique situation were made by the Secretary of State in conjunction with some of his Cabinet colleagues.

Under the President's Executive authorities, medical evacuation for injured Americans was immediately ordered, and the United States Government offered assistance to the Government of Guyana to prevent further loss of life. As events progressed, it became clear that there were large numbers of Americans dead. For a time, it was believed that there were survivors in the jungle; and the United States adjusted and increased its assistance to help the search by Guyana police and military. Finally, when the full scope of the tragedy of Jonestown was clear, our Government was requested by the Government of Guyana to remove the bodies. This operation was considered essential in handling the emergency situation which existed in Guyana at the time.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/HR
REVIEWED BY _____ DATE _____
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EXCLUSIVE EXEMPTION ☐
DECLASSIFY ☐ EXEMPT ☐ RELEASABLE ☐
RELEASE EXEMPTIONS ☐
PA or FOI EXEMPTIONS

The Honorable
Bill Gradison
House of Representatives

The Justice Department is fully exploring possible legal remedies which can be used to recover the cost the U.S. Government has incurred in removing and processing the bodies of Americans from Guyana. Now that the emergency is substantially over, the Office of Management and Budget and other agencies are reviewing the various operations to determine the exact cost to the United States Government. Although the costs to the United States Government of an effort of this magnitude obviously are considerable, they are substantially less than the $8 million figure used in some press reports. Please be assured that we will report fully to appropriate congressional committees on these aspects of the operation upon completion of our review. Meanwhile, the Justice Department will make all efforts to recover the costs to the U.S. Government.

If you have any further questions, you may wish to contact Deputy Assistant Secretary John Bushnell. His telephone is 632-8562.

Sincerely,

DB/GW

Douglas J. Bennet, Jr.
Assistant Secretary
for Congressional Relations

ARA/PPC:JSchreiber:mbb #0180-1504

Clearances: Inter-Agency
ARA:GLister
ARA:JBushnell
H:ENef
EN/GW

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BILL GRADISON
...T DISTRICT, OHIO
RON ROBERTS
ADMINISTRATIVE ASSISTANT

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Congress of the United States
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Washington, D.C. 20515

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December 4, 1978

4 ACTION is assigned to ARA

Mr. Douglas Bennet
Office of Congressional Relations
The State Department
2201 C Street, N.W.
Room 7261
Washington, D.C. 20520

Dear Mr. Bennet:

I have been contacted by a number of my constituents recently concerning the cost of returning the bodies of members of the Peoples Temple to the United States.

In order to respond to my constituents, I would appreciate some information on the situation. Specifically, how much money has been and will be expended on the transportation of the bodies from Guyana? Also, what is the legal basis for expenditure of money for this type of operation and in what similar instances has the United States performed this type of service?

Thank you for your time and consideration.

Sincerely,

Bill Gradison
Representative in Congress

BG/nt

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